



LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

77th Year

25 AUGUST 1978

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

SOUTHERN ARTS

Writer in Residence 1979

Applications are invited from authors of published poetry or fiction for a residency attached to Wiltshire County Library and Museum Service and based at Devizes Public Library. The appointment will be for one year beginning in January, 1979, and a grant of £4,000 will be offered. Further details from the Literature Officer, Southern Arts, 19 Southgate Street, Winchester, Hampshire SO23 9EB. Please quote reference WR12. Closing date for applications: 25th September, 1978.

SOUTHERN ARTS

Literary Bursaries 1978/79

Bursaries renewable for periods of from three months to one year are available to authors of published poetry or fiction who reside in the Southern Arts region. Awards will be of varying amounts, but the maximum allocated to any one writer in one year will be £3,000. Further details from the Literature Officer, Southern Arts Association, 19 Southgate Street, Winchester, Hants SO23 9EB. Please quote reference L12. Closing date for applications: Monday, 16 October.

Norwich Book Fair

Blackfriars Hall, St Andrews Hall Plain, Norwich. Friday, 1st September, noon to 8 pm. Saturday, 2nd September, 10 am to 5 pm. 40 Stands. Admission 20p. Organised by Provincial Booksellers Fairs Assn. 11 Boutport Street, Barnstable, N. Devon. Barnstable 3641.

LIBRARIANS

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(re-advertisement)

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Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, Leicester Polytechnic, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER CENTRE

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Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, University of Exeter, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

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Librarian required for routine duties including cataloguing, shelving, and issuing. Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, ASLIS Library, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

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Librarian required for routine duties including cataloguing, shelving, and issuing. Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, The City University Library, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

SCOTTISH JOURNALISTIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Applications are invited from professional librarians for the post of Librarian in the Scottish Journalistic Research Institute. The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, Scottish Journalistic Research Institute, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

LOTHIAN REGIONAL COUNCIL

Applications are invited from professional librarians for the post of Librarian in the Lothian Regional Council. The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, Lothian Regional Council, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Applications are invited from professional librarians for the post of Librarian in the Department of Education. The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, Department of Education, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

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Applications are invited from professional librarians for the post of Librarian in the Staffordshire County Council. The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, Staffordshire County Council, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

EDUCATION AUTHORITY

Applications are invited from professional librarians for the post of Librarian in the Education Authority. The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Salary: £4,246 to £4,623 per annum (dependent on experience). The post is full-time, 37.5 hours per week.

Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, Education Authority, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

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Applications giving full particulars should be sent to the Librarian, 100-102, The Quadrant, Leicester LE1 7RH. Closing date: 1st September 1978.

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A quest without an object

By Robert Boyers

JOHN ASHBERY:
Hansabout Days
88pp. New York: Viking Press.
\$7.95.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN:
Unassigned Frequencies
296pp. Urbana: University of Illinois Press (American University Publishers' Group). £8.40 (paperback, £3.80).

John Ashbery has become the most successful poet in America. He has won the major literary prizes, his books are widely available in paperback editions, and his work is carefully scrutinized in the important literary and review columns. Harold Bloom, surely a courtly voice in contemporary criticism, thinks him the most distinguished American poet of our time, and the magazines are full of poems written by younger writers trying to sum up very much like the master. Though other accomplished poets like Howard Nemerov also win the prizes and attract readers, none creates interest like the interest aroused by Ashbery.

This is a peculiar phenomenon. Some of us have tried with small success to explain Ashbery in the classroom, concluding that a great many complete poems, and large portions of others, resist any kind of explanation. Other more gifted interpreters have concluded that even where ordinary readings work, they do not tell us what is going on in the way of the poem's thought. Ashbery has won a great many admirers in recent years, but none would make of him an easy or routinely accessible poet. For admirers and detractors alike, the poems often puzzle, sometimes impress, but rarely clarify.

T. S. Eliot more than once recommended that we be tolerant of genuinely innovative poets who seem difficult, concluding as it were that Browning was early thought a willfully difficult poet. Somehow, though, it doesn't help to be reminded of Browning when one is trying to come to terms with a sequence of lines like the following:

Wh... stupid song... that
Is all gone now. But the apocalyptic
blaze is withheld.

Where a little spectral
Cliffs, leaning over into irony's
Gotten silently inflicted on the
Marining underminds, the daughter
is.

The lines are taken from a long poem called "The Skaters", and have been identified by other commentators as pointless and enigmatic. But no finite passages in recent Ashbery poems as well, and one may not be content to discover adjacent passages that comment on something more. Eliot contended that a "seasoned reader" would not "bother about understanding; not, at least, at first", but it is surely reasonable to assume that we shall in time want to make something of what we read. Some readers, apparently, have been willing to accept Ashbery for the fragments that do offer an insight, contemplate an object, represent a particular feeling, or evoke a sentiment, no matter how modest or fleeting. Others have been grateful for the little they could find.

The question of meaning in poetry remains for most of us an open issue, and what convictions we have about it are likely to be threatened by poets like Ashbery who flout conventions without wishing to apologize. If, as Eliot thought, and most of us would now agree, meaning is not what a poem says, it may be thought that an option like any other, a device, to be resorted to or not as the given project requires. This is not an alarming view so long as you associate meaning with ideas. We accept, gladly, that most poets do not work from formulated ideas or positions which they proceed to illustrate as vividly and clearly as they can. But if we take meaning to refer to the possibility of shared discourse, in which speaker and

auditor may participate more or less equally, then we may be less willing to see it as an option like any other. Eliot wanted meaning "to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him". But he conceded that it could operate in just that way for all poets, some of whom would "become impatient of this 'meaning', which seems superfluous, and pervasive possibilities of intensity through its elimination. I am not asserting that this situation is ideal, but I want to say: 'only that we must write our poem as we can, and take it as we find it'."

Ashbery is an instance of the poet who, through much of his career, eliminates meaning without achieving any special intensity. Always concerned with what he seems to have generated a form of anxiety within himself that impels him to demonstrate that he can operate without fear of check or censure by canon or convention. It doesn't matter in a typical Ashbery poem what is left out, or what might have linked one thought to another. The poet operates in what is thought to be a mild trance, in which he is relieved of the compulsion to connect. This is no agony of trance, mind you, an visionary access to a new world, or a discovery. Ashbery's poems discover nothing but the possibility of ordinary experience, an experience as disburdened of ordinary sequence and weight in these poems that it ceases to seem entirely work. Though he tells us he is on his way in some well-known half-remembered moment or place, we feel he cares little for the moment or the place, that he likes the sensation of reaching without knowing what it is he is groping for. The discovery of ordinary meaning has less to do with its being superfluous than with its shutting him out conveniently to places he would as soon never reach. Committed only to grammar, never to seizing anything, he is in a sense securely in the poem, as a flaneur is in the city. On a quest without an object, meaning is a comfortable harbour, the skilled mariner will steer around, pretending to be carried by currents created by the unimagined, intermittent flappings of his own wings.

Meaning, then, is often left out of an Ashbery poem not to deprive readers of what they expect but to ensure the continuity of a quest for which any are necessarily disburdened. For the reader to understand more than he does, the poet would have to try to master his materials more completely. Though the poet here and there indicates that there are epistemological depths he would like to plumb, and thereby invites comparison with Wallace Stevens, he is not really interested in what he can know. Aiming instead at a "pure" affirmation that doesn't affirm anything, he is a modest adventurer who savours the sensation of an experience without determining content.

There are worse things for a poet to aim at, and Ashbery has the virtue of refusing to pretend he is after anything else. One has only to compare his accounts of the project with some of the more inflated claims of friendly critics to appreciate his restraint. Ashbery has no new meaning to deliver, no epistemological depths to plumb, and thereby invites comparison with Wallace Stevens, he is not really interested in what he can know. Aiming instead at a "pure" affirmation that doesn't affirm anything, he is a modest adventurer who savours the sensation of an experience without determining content.

Ashbery published several books in the 1950s and 1960s, but the volume *The Double Dream of Spring* (1970) marked a departure. The poems were recognizable but not the discontinuous and reticent as the previous ones. The occasional bursts of lyricism were more rewarding and

sustained. And the spiritual ancestry of Auden—whom he had selected as a Yale Poets Prize winner in 1956—seemed for the first time fully apparent. This was one way of coming in terms with Ashbery. If readers felt they could tell what was going on in an Ashbery poem, they could respond to it as lost or addressing or failing to address their needs. These needs may be surmised by studying the version of Ashbery offered by the poet Laurence Lieberman in a new book surveying the American poetry scene. Lieberman devotes the longest essay in his *Unassigned Frequencies*, some sixty pages, to Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975), and though he doesn't make much of the Auden connection, the essay might in part be taken for a gloss on the late poet's best-known poem.

Lieberman's Ashbery has done his best to clear away obscurities, and there is no doubt that by 1970 there were conversions. The poet continues to dream, but he has more patience with particulars, more readiness to let a thing or a thought work itself out before discarding it. The displacements, though they occur, are more liquid, less abrupt, as though Ashbery had come to feel some muted affection for the objects and sentiments brought abruptly to the fore. It is not always possible to name the objects, but the poem does not lose its function of objects, but one feels that a drama of some moment is taking shape. We sense that Ashbery's is a sensibility for which mundane experience has a value that nothing more terrible or idealizing can displace. Like Auden, he is moved by the humbly low and by quiet sensations. If he remains still more difficult than Auden, it may be only a matter of his coming to terms reluctantly with the discovery that Auden was ever prepared to celebrate.

Lieberman celebrates the disposition for Ashbery, as though he had been commissioned to do so by the poet himself. This can be an amusing spectacle, the critic making perfectly clear and obvious what is tentative and full of defensive irony in the verse. Thus, Ashbery's "made into a 'hold and disintegrated' voice, and given 'power to fully embrace the present moment' when he is never more than in doubt about his desire to do so." The poet who speaks an essentially private language is said to be like an "making" changes in the whole fabric of our country's mass sensibility—"as if Ashbery believed that a thing were possible. Committed to surfaces, the play of words, the temperance, Ashbery is turned into a 'transparent' for the invisible depths." Lieberman's take to local long-sustained cultural values. It is hard to imagine Ashbery in this version of his "Convex Mirror", but then American poets are always turned into secret and culture prophets by the faithful, and it has to be a mark of a faithful poet for a poet to feel the mantle on his shoulders without ever having asked for it.

But Lieberman can be very good at elucidating the disposition Ashbery shares with Auden. The poet is said to be the leading edge of a momentous change sweeping the culture. It is, in fact, "ready—as no one else can be—to collaborate with the change, to be its faithful steward." This he manages by being "open to every possibility," so that "the discovery of the poet in this 'void' is a discovery of the poet as critic who comes to pass in this great change, but it is associated

with an enlargement of the communal dream-life, a greater willingness to let events happen without forcing or directing them. By affirming a general truth without affirming anything in particular, the poet finds himself in a 'receptive' state. What he leaves out of his poems is a mysteriously found to have been put back in—in some other form," so that really nothing is ever omitted, nothing taken to be more vital than anything else. Lieberman is singularly helpful in getting at this tendency in Ashbery's poetry, to accept everything by totally flattening distinctions and pretending they were never serious distinctions at all. Only Lieberman thinks of it as a heroic enterprise, where Ashbery is altogether more uncertain, and Auden positively amused by the unheroic irony implicit in such a posture.

Ashbery's is no ideological posture, so following-up of a conviction he wishes to impose. When Lieberman correctly states that "all moments and events are equalized" and that Ashbery's medium reduces everything to "one uniform substance," he does not mention that this is an effect of trance, not the achievement of a programme. Like Auden, Ashbery is the more or less comfortable victim of a tendency he has not the power to resist. In his own temperament and true-like disposition, he turns his own law into a law of nature. What seems to Lieberman a "mythic reality" to which we gain access is in fact nothing more than the poet's shadow on the wall, which he takes for the truth itself. Randall Jarrell's 1940 critique of Auden in these terms has much to tell us about Ashbery, who operates in similar ways. What makes the poets finally different is the absence of a moralizing dimension in Ashbery, who is content to pursue his elusive disposition without insisting upon its viability for others. Lieberman's emphasis on the political and moral urgency in Ashbery reflects an attempt to substitute a definitive "Audenque" value for what is on even milder and more limited ambition.

Whatever the very real differences, Ashbery can count more like Auden than any other poet, even in poems so playfully illusive that it is hard to find to say what they intend. Consider the opening stanza and concluding fragment of "The Lament upon the Waters" from *Hansabout Days*, a volume that flirts with domestic concerns as persistently as it puts one securely in mind of Auden:

Far the discipline nothing had changed. The road was still
Gaily tolerance, as the road marched
Singing its little song of despair.
Once a cry
Started up out of the hills. That old, puzzling persuasion
Again.

It is all one. It has
All around, its new message, guilt.
Of guilt, your new act. Time buys
The receiver, the outlooker of the
earlier system, but cannot
Buy back the rest.
Or look at the opening of the title poem:

The skin is broken. The hotel break-
fast chine
Poking ahead to the last week in
August, not really

Very much at all, found the way
The hills smouldered up blue the
day, age
You walk five feet along the edge
and you duck
As a common horse sweeps one
about the
About this for centuries and
the hills
Blossoms again in the dunes. The soil
is so hospitable, taking in everything
like borders.
The surprising strength of a line
like "The hills smouldered up blue
that day..." will not admit to
disrupt us from the essential
limitation and cohesiveness of this
verse in what is the most accessible
of Ashbery's books. One does
not have to be able to identify
the disciple in the first poem, or
the common horse in the second,
to see how the poems work.

The critic Roger Shattuck recently observed that the poems "allow a
discipline in the way they
identify the 'I' they
discipline. But no one may say
Ashbery has more in mind than
circumstance, the way of the
which he is flexibly compliant. His
poems bear a reluctant witness to
indefinite experience which is
intended to awake fleeting images in
the reader's mind.

If the poet's images are meant
rather than the poems, they are
of memory, they are
the less to air vague sensations
which may move to know
extensively poignant sources, in
care. Intermittently, for the
transparencies in Ashbery because
of his disposition, they are
a depth of clarity the issue of
their heads only to duck and
again. Auden had greater wit,
seems to have felt he had more
stake in setting things down
before passing judgment. In
Ashbery's poems, the unconscious
arrangements he has a ready atti-
tude of self-censorship. Lieber-
man, though, likes his poets to keep
in touch with reality, and is willing
to celebrate a reality that has been
reduced to "one/uniform" sub-
stance. That he can take this
reality for an untidied indicator
that he has not thought critically
about the culture in which he lives,
Auden and each alternative he made
work, we should have no occasion
to complain of him. The poems in
Hansabout Days are, not his best,

Mixed days, the mindless years,
perceived
With half-parted lips
The ways the breath of spring
creeps up on you and flours you:
I had thought of all this years
before
But now it was making no sense.
And the song had finished:
This was the story.

One critic speaks of these lines as
"in transform a collage
of moments into some cognitive
meaning", but one sees at once
how limp and half-hearted is the
assault. Ashbery appeals to
American readers because he knows
the game is hopeless even before
it is played, and is too sophisticated
to be taken in by the prospect of
a winning encounter. What the
critic calls "cognitive meaning" is
nothing more than surrender to an
experience without point or climax.
Lieberman similarly speaks of
"civic progressivism" and marvels at
the very form "slavishly accumulates
epiphany"; but he never tells us
what is shown forth in those epi-
phany, and fails to locate actual
positions in the cycle. Ashbery is
literary America's favourite poet
because the emotional truth he
wants to convey is entirely resist-
ant to questions of value and signi-
ficance which contemporary intel-
lectuals see as tedious and empty.

Lieberman's new collection of
poems and reviews represents some
of the best and some of the most
self-indulgent thinking to be found
in the American poetry community.
It is a thoughtful and usually care-
ful critic, but his elaborate mis-
reading of Ashbery is symptomatic
of large tendencies. He makes of
him, or indicates a propensity for
an allegorical, a genuine hero
whose "interior cosmos" will "pro-
vide an antidote to the disease of
the culture". Represented here is
the prospect of assuming a "role
in public life" without taking actual
responsibility or responding in particu-
lar to any existing challenge. Ash-
bery knows better than to intrinsify
anything, and he can usually be
counted on to deplete nothing but
first thoughts and substantive
ideas. For the discourse of worldly
types with a stake in political
arrangements he has a ready atti-
tude of self-censorship. Lieber-
man, though, likes his poets to keep
in touch with reality, and is willing
to celebrate a reality that has been
reduced to "one/uniform" sub-
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Hansabout Days are, not his best,

Ashbery might be thought to go
against the grain of popular Ameri-
can verse, in present a challenge
to those who want their poetry
and, relatively easy, the best poetry
in our time. In *Convex Mirror*,
though it is not of all what some
have tried to make of it, is a work
of great majesty and inventive
craft. In his philosophical rigor it
demands a kind of core and
seriousness not usually found in
poetry in our time. And it works
closely with a more or less fixed
subject which it takes to be interest-
ing not merely for the sensations it
may evoke but in itself. And Ash-
bery has been able to sustain that
kind of commitment in his many re-
cent work, we should have no occasion
to complain of him. The poems in
Hansabout Days are, not his best,

he bathes his lyric discourse can
promise everything without dismis-
sing any possibility. In Lieberman's
critical vision of the future, after
all, "supply is always critical to de-
mand": what a pleasure it must be
to speak such words and believe
one is speaking of reality even as
one is speaking of one's favorite
poet.

Lieberman's book doesn't pur-
port to cover every corner of the
scene, but he considers a good
variety of poems in pieces composed
over a dozen years. As anticipated,
the critic who has an elaborate case
in make for Ashbery will have less
favourable things to say of Howard
Nemerov, whose "abscissate anity
of vision" seems to Lieberman a bet-
ter way of junction. He takes James
Wright to task for "too much
closure", and waxes ecstatic over
the "unbroken flow" of meander-
ing music in A. R. Ammons. He is
typically suspicious of a surface
brilliance, as in Richard Howard
or Howard Moss—and far too ready
to embrace a body of work that
speaks to the "purity of being" in
him; thus, his illuminating essay on
W. S. Merwin which sadly fails to
notice the limps in his poetry.
Lines as the moulinet in the
worked up in his other quoted
passages. Lieberman has an eye
for young talent but it's not usually
possible to distinguish his praise of
one poet from the praise of another.

The critic who thinks Ashbery
flimsily committed to an ethics of
"clear-sightedness" is likely to
blink a fair proportion of the evi-
dence that passes before him.
Lieberman may be the best poetry
critic in our time, but he is too close
to the pulse of the country to understand
completely what it lies down to
many of its poets.

Ashbery might be thought to go
against the grain of popular Ameri-
can verse, in present a challenge
to those who want their poetry
and, relatively easy, the best poetry
in our time. In *Convex Mirror*,
though it is not of all what some
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closely with a more or less fixed
subject which it takes to be interest-
ing not merely for the sensations it
may evoke but in itself. And Ash-
bery has been able to sustain that
kind of commitment in his many re-
cent work, we should have no occasion
to complain of him. The poems in
Hansabout Days are, not his best,

but among them we find items that
repay attention. Among these are
"Business Personal", "The Explan-
ation", and "The Giving Grain".
No single poem in the volume may
be said to fill us with wonder and
gratitude as our favorite poems do,
but none seems perverse or willfully
"exotic" in the way of the earlier
work. The achieved poems may not
be terribly different from the
others, but we do have, occasionally,
the sense that Ashbery's whimsy is
in check, and that he wants us to
work at something with him, not
to be astonished or amused.

The most notable development in
Hansabout Days is apparent in each
of the better poems I have cited.
Ashbery has taken in them the
material in a way that is bound
in check, and that he wants us to
work at something with him, not
to be astonished or amused.

In fact, the first chapter seems
perhaps almost deliberately
aimed at making the reader feel
safe. The London poets of the 1890s
are introduced as a colourful but
encompassed bunch, by 1900 some-
thing designated as "modern" was
"stirring furiously in the wings".
Edward Merrell's Georgian Poetry
"blurs the scene" with its apocryph-
ical eclecticism etc. All this, though
in its way falsifying, does tend to
erect a proscenium arch around
the proceedings. Sit down and
meet the poets from a comfort-
able distance. Name them, then
going to jump out on you. Then
come later, on further acquaintance.

Once this limitation is accepted,
though, and once it is realized that
there are to be no eccentric judg-
ments, that most reservations will
be tentative or presented by means
of judicious weighing of the com-
mentators (as "To see it is a
major problem", others have writ-
ten), it remains only to admire
Anthony Thwaite's skill and
fluency in introducing the pantheon.
He begins with Hopkins, and de-
votedly strikes its final announce-
ment. Thwaite's handling is excel-
lent—demystifying without over-
simplifying, and Auden, whose
later work he generously defends.
Indeed, generosity is another virtue
that the whole book possesses in
abundance, and that this can be
achieved without sacrificing critical
standards is well shown by Mr
Thwaite's handling of the tricky

A tour of the pantheon

By John Mole

ANTHONY THWAITE:
Twentieth Century English Poetry
144pp. Heinemann. £3.95.

This is a useful book, and was
originally designed to be so. In 1957
Anthony Thwaite published his first
version under the title *Essays on
Contemporary English Poetry*, basing
it on lectures given to Japanese
students at the University of London.
The book, and the latter's stock is
unquestionably raised by the largest
piece of elucidatory analysis in the
book, a splendid reading of "After
the Funeral".

Mr Thwaite points out at the end
of a chapter on "some other poets
of the 1930s and 1940s" that a guide
or primer such as his is no place in
which to make comprehensive list-
ings which the author is "mere assur-
ance that the book is a decently
oriented", and elsewhere he re-
fuses to "collapse from hetero-
geneousness into chaos". Good
checks on the headlong impulse,
and it is equally unlikely that a
short review could do justice to
the range of *Twentieth-Century
English Poetry*. On the whole, those
that are selected for comment seem
to be the right ones (though every
experienced reader will ask "where
is the 1920s?", and where the poetry
of 1960 onwards is concerned it is
always possible to turn to the same
author's more inclusive account
given in *Poetry Today, 1960-1973*,
recently published by Longman.

In the present book there are,
nevertheless, some odd imbalances
in the attempt to bring assessments
of recent poets up to date. Peter
Farmer, for example, is credited with
as illustrated by a poem from his
latest collection, whereas R. S.
Thomas—a poet who has developed
remarkably over the past few years
—is represented essentially a bard of
the Welsh hills. Country is a token
reference is made to M. N. and none
at all to the poems written since
then, despite the fact that he is joint-
editor of *Encounter* Mr Thwaite has
published a number of them.

A wise, restrained book, then, that
should end students in search of
the poets and encourage them to
make their own evaluations. It does
not claim to be gospel; but in the
absence of other worthwhile
primers of its kind, its importance
should not be underestimated.

case of M. C. Day Lewis, whose senti-
mentality and preoccupation with
passive are ruthlessly demonstrated
but with such fair-mindedness that
it is hard to imagine any good
student feeling that the Day Lewis
file has been closed by what he
has just read.

Sixties doses of sympathy and
stricture are administered to D. I.
Lawrence and Dylan Thomas. In
the case of the former, the qualities
of the "strangely patterned" poems
are emphasized at the expense of
the "petulant notes" to be found
in *Panics*, and the latter's stock is
unquestionably raised by the largest
piece of elucidatory analysis in the
book, a splendid reading of "After
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The Only White Thing

Beside the cottage, the river-gates
Complex as a lobster's jaws;
In the oven the crusty dome rises.
The weather coils like a sea-shell.
Made of thunderstorms and enormous voices.
She carves mountains out of the bread,
We lower our heads to say grace.
The thunder utters; in a dark room
By the inkly lark, bread is the only white thing.

Peter Redgrove

John Ashbery

Words of wisdom

By Peter Walcott

In *Dionysia* we encounter twenty articles on Pindar, four on Aeschylus, six on Sophocles and two on Euripides. The last of these, on Corneille's demonstration of "his Aeschylus" on elaiet our expectations, these studies are technical. In the sense that they discuss delicate points of text and in interpreting thought. Dr. Dawid is both technical and deliciously wicked when considering the end of the *Sepia* "yet again". But all are a worthwhile tribute to Sir Denys Page in continuing his work with scholarship and literary sensitivity, and here would specially mention P. Estorling on the second elaiet of the *Antigone* and W. Ritchie's *Epiphany at Aulis* (pp. 519-20). In the fear, the binding up contents of this volume, which we shall to elaiet the text of time.

them rewarding mainly for
tistical clues, they contain no
true and complete history of

This new book, though not one of her major accomplishments, is nevertheless well worthy of her splendid series of publications. It is not, however, quite what it seems to be because it does not include emperors, and it is not a history of the Augustus who is treated as the best Republican, but it does include foreign rulers who came under the sway of, or had significant contacts with, Rome.

The approach is largely numismatic, because "obviously the most authentic of the portraits that concern us here are those on coins, of which the names and titles of the individuals represented are normally inscribed beside them. And it is generally from their numismatic likenesses that the sculptural portraits of public characters perceived to be identified."

The book is well worth reading for the introduction alone, which offers a brief but highly authoritative study of the Greek and Roman portraits. (My only regret is that we still have to endure the term "verism", which

larly important when heretofore remarkable array of lesser-known printings, often depicted in color, of which it would be extremely difficult to find any other publisher's reproduction at all. Finally, the book is quite useful to the Arabian and Persian (Sassanian) royal portraits, to which the eye is readily run because of the rich picturesqueness of their stylized adornments. In the former series, frontispiece portrait of about A.D. 500, the Sassanian king is shown in frontal portrait on a stone relief a century later; then, coming to the Sassanians, we are given ample opportunity to admire their extraordinarily distinctive head-dresses, varying from helio to regalia, and to see right up to the end of the Sassanian kingdom, from the last king, Ardashir, to about 651, so even though it must be suspected, accorded as little attention in modern Iranian schoolbooks as the tenth-century British de-facto Emperor of the East, the Khalif in the name of France, in our view, the books studied in their own schools.

[illegible]

What if Hitler had won?

Jonathan Cape
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Fringe benefits in Salzburg

Moving through the eighteenth-century Innsbruck to Salzburg, Nontel on route to the Salzburg Festival one is drawn into a past that for most of us is only experienced in art. He must be the inhabitants of the city value this privilege as another matter, though many of Salzburg's ordinary citizens wear their national costume with nonchalant pride, adding to the visitor's feeling of trespassing on some sacred ground. He must be the inhabitants of the city value this privilege as another matter, though many of Salzburg's ordinary citizens wear their national costume with nonchalant pride, adding to the visitor's feeling of trespassing on some sacred ground. He must be the inhabitants of the city value this privilege as another matter, though many of Salzburg's ordinary citizens wear their national costume with nonchalant pride, adding to the visitor's feeling of trespassing on some sacred ground.

Verdi's nineteenth-century masterpiece is revolutionary stuff; befiling to a Italian tradition of opera, it is a social provocation that survives, albeit unhealed, in Nontel and by adoption in Heme. Musically, the opera makes its point by ironic juxtaposition of a drama set in the light social context of a remote past, with a music unashamedly appealing to contemporary popular idiom, signifying the awakening conscience of the masses. This irony is part of a wider tradition embraced by composers as different as Berg and Kurt Weill. To convey the disturbing tension between dramatic setting and musical action is central to Verdi's art, and it requires a presentation of suitable stringency. But at £30-£400 a seat, the last thing a Salzburg audience wants is to be made to feel uncomfortable.

The stage ritual unfolded in eeriness for most of the time, while the orchestra pit remained brightly illuminated—no note too subtle piece of upstaging. Karajan imparted his famous allure to an orchestral sound

that for all its slackness in effect was substantially too weighty (light dramatic effect, filling the Festspielhaus with a fat Viennese resonance which the soloists strained to penetrate).

Hopply, there is much more to Salzburg than this. One can leave the Festspielhaus to the coach and limousine trade, abandon the Festspielhaus office to grudgingly complaining critics, and find real culture just around the corner at the Szene der Jugend (Scene of Youth), a series of concerts, plays and exhibitions that has been running in parallel to the official Festspiel since 1948. Founded and organized by Fredy Winter under the auspices of the Club 2000, an artists' collective formed to fill the cultural vacuum created by the Festspiel, the Szene der Jugend offers a more lively collection of lively activities geared to the interests and incomes of the young. It includes jazz and cabaret, a satirical revue on the education system called *Quartier der Back, There!*, a one-act show by Franz Josef Bogner, a line in repertory, and a feminist entertainment by Udo Schöen called *Sex: FEMALE, Identifiable Characteristics*. None, such provocation is well taken by the city fathers of the Festspiel, at the grand opening of this year's Scene of Youth, State Minister Wilfried Haslauer laid aside his prepared speech and delivered an off-the-cuff address that stole the show.

Important though it may be for morale, there is more to these counter-cultural happenings than satire. Just as important is the plan-

responsible for creating a large number of small commissions, capable of endless reproduction by his studio. These were the highly prized gifts that the Medici grand dukes would send to other European courts.

The format of the exhibition departs from the normal chronological approach to concentrate upon thematic headings: male and female figures, groups, equestrian monuments, genre figures, religious sculpture, and animals. This is entirely sensible with Giambologna's career since many works lack a precise dating or were returned to over the years. At the same time it brings home to a general audience the problems of bronze conservation. The varying degrees of authenticity are reflected in the numerous versions of popular compositions like the "Mars", each slightly different in stance or gesture. It is

also possible to appreciate the wide contrast in surface patination, which often tells more about the artist's handling than the work itself. Above all, one can have a unique experience of studying the growth in torso and complexity of the two and three-dimensional versions of the "Rape of the Sabines" or of comparing the two earliest versions of Giambologna's most famous work, the bronze *Mercury*. The changes between the *Mercury* from Bologna and Vienna are instructive: the former is a rough cast, stocky in its proportions, a first essay in the pose of a god; the latter betrays its purpose as a *Kunstkammer* object through its high finish, its attenuated proportions, and the subtle change in the pose of the index finger from curving back to pointing upward.

The exhibition and its impressive catalogue were designed with eyes to connoisseurs. As the opening, they were out to fill the hall for filling marks and to expose patinas. For those less familiar with Giambologna, there were a number of posters showing the pivotal role between the age of Michelangelo and that of Bernini. There are thousands of different worlds and there are thousands of different bacteria, and that chance put that mould in the light spot at the right time was the winning Irish Sweep.

To the other kinds of luck, the investigator himself makes a contribution. His contribution may take the form of activity: by having himself with experienced and manipulating the natural world, he increases the number of unusual events around him and thus renders it more likely that he will make some chance discovery. Austin cites the discovery of an influenza virus by a student who had tested 505 different compounds; the six hundred and thirty, he brought his success.

SCIENCE

JAMES H. AUSTIN:
Chance, Chance and Creativity: The Lucky Art of Novelty
Stipp, Columbia University Press.
\$12.95.

So one would deny that successful scientists, like good generals, need luck. *Chance, Chance and Creativity* is a discursive essay on the nature of science in which James Austin attempts to classify the kinds of luck involved and to illustrate that operation from his own and others' research.

Professor Austin's first kind of luck is pure luck—the one chance is a thousand that occurs without the investigator having done anything to deserve it. By just such a stroke, a spore of penicillin happened to settle in a Petri dish in which Sir Alexander Fleming was cultivating staphylococci. He subsequently noticed that the bacteria in the neighbourhood of the mould had failed to grow, an event which he subsequently wrote: "There are thousands of different worlds and there are thousands of different bacteria, and that chance put that mould in the light spot at the right time was the winning Irish Sweep."

The third kind of luck requires the ability to notice that something odd and possibly significant has occurred: it favours the prepared mind. When Roentgen was experimenting with cathode rays in a darkened room, he noticed that some barium platinocyanide which he had placed nearby was glowing. It was not ordinary light that he saw, but a fluorescence since the cathode rays lay between the cathode and the glowing barium. The successful investigators were only too well aware that they did not soon succeed, someone else would. When we turn from the greatest scientists to the ordinary ranks the situation is even more extreme: they are lucky if their discoveries are not published by four or five others almost simultaneously.

It may be noted parenthetically how different is the situation of the creative artist or writer: even for all time, in science it is the new idea or the discovery that is important; the circumstances in which discoveries are made, the personality of the investigator, and the style in which his results are expressed are of little long-term consequence.

It is because the products of scientific research are not unique to the individual that most scientists are so desperate to achieve priority of publication; they are as keen to be first with the news as journalists. Of this passion, Professor Austin writes: "Bystanders tend to view this kind of concern solely as a personality conflict between two or more fame-seeking persons as to which will emerge with the glory in the eyes of their contemporaries or in those of posterity."

He then attempts to refute the bystander's view. He argues that the scientist needs a "clear sense of his own identity". Much of his life is his work and he cannot convince himself that his work is unimportant. He has a sense of identity. "The inner-directed creative investigator... defines his territory in order to establish who he is, so that he himself will clearly know."

The thrills of discovery

By Stuart Sutherland

would never have settled on his Petri dish. One is reminded of the view of history as chance caricatured in Benjamin Franklin's aphoristic story which begins "For want of a nail the shoe was lost" and which goes on to show how this event led inexorably to the loss of a kingdom: but kingdoms that are lost "all for the want of a nail" when Fleming discovered penicillin advanced to a point that made inevitable the discovery of new and more powerful antibiotics.

It is important to distinguish between the role of chance in the career of the individual investigator and its effects on the progress of science as a whole. In many other fields, Professor Austin was influenced in his choice of speciality—neurology, by chance encounters with distinguished and enthusiastic teachers of that subject. Within neurology, his choice of research topic was determined by a series of accidents, including his encounter with a patient with a rare disease, the discovery, while browsing in a library, of an article that flited him, and a liking for vivid colours that went back to childhood. These factors led him to undertake research on metachromasia, a disease of the nervous system, in which the affected matter turns bright red when stained with certain dyes. However this may be, he chose some other medical speciality his enthusiasm, persistence, and ability to master the necessary techniques would have enabled him to make just as useful a contribution. Moreover, had Austin not worked on metachromasia, his discoveries about the disease would almost certainly have been made by someone else.

Indeed, the scale and corporate nature of modern science is such that one can doubt whether any individual investigator can advance his work by more than a few years. Darwin himself was prompted to publish only because Wallace had independently prepared a paper outlining the idea of natural selection; had Einstein never lived, we might have had to wait five or ten years for the special theory of relativity; in both cases the relevant ideas were in the air at the time. In the case of the most important modern discovery in biology—the structure of DNA—the successful investigators were only too well aware that they did not soon succeed, someone else would. When we turn from the greatest scientists to the ordinary ranks the situation is even more extreme: they are lucky if their discoveries are not published by four or five others almost simultaneously.

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This feeling carries little conviction. However many scientists publish the same discovery simultaneously, the struggles that each has undergone and the obstacles he has surmounted in his quest are personal and unique to him. If his results are accepted by another investigator, it is his vanity and career prospects that are threatened, not his sense of identity.

The emphasis placed on priority of publication is damaging to the progress of science. Elsewhere Professor Austin tells a revealing phrase on the art of writing applications to fund-giving agencies: "How much documentation should the applicant include at the risk of revealing true secrets?" This is well founded, as a glance at the Double Helix will show. I know of one much-travelled scientist with a formidable reputation whose career is largely based on his visits to the laboratories of others: when he comes across an interesting experiment, he steals it and gains the credit by rushing the results into publication. Even within a single laboratory, the exchange of information is often guarded through the fear that a colleague will discover something to sense its value and use it to enough to publish it first. Scientists are so fearful of good ideas that they can console themselves for plagiarism with the thought that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Perhaps the most despicable and common form of such misappropriation of ideas is the habit that some senior scientists have of themselves taking the credit for the work of their graduate students whose contributions are often outweighed those of their supervisors.

There is, of course, nothing surprising about such goings-on, unless one starts with the idealistic view that all scientists are motivated by the disinterested pursuit of the truth. Science is a highly competitive enterprise and breeds both the true enthusiast and the villain. Deliberate faking of results is probably rare, but by no means unknown. If a scientist is intelligent enough to be able to fake results plausibly, it is foolish enough not to need to fake them. The suppression of the odd result that does not agree with a cherished theory is more common and can occur without deliberate dishonesty: perhaps something was wrong with the apparatus. Einstein never lived, we might have had to wait five or ten years for the special theory of relativity; in both cases the relevant ideas were in the air at the time. In the case of the most important modern discovery in biology—the structure of DNA—the successful investigators were only too well aware that they did not soon succeed, someone else would. When we turn from the greatest scientists to the ordinary ranks the situation is even more extreme: they are lucky if their discoveries are not published by four or five others almost simultaneously.

I have dwelt upon some of the less attractive aspects of organized science because they are almost entirely ignored by Professor Austin. In the autobiographical section of his book, he presents himself as an exceptionally idealistic, well-balanced, well-rounded man, with genuine dedication to his work and a capacity for enjoying a multitude of activities. He gives an excellent account of the scientific chase derived from the excitement of discovery and from the thrill of discovery. Indeed, in describing the joy of new insight he becomes downright mystical.

The puzzle seems to solve itself. With only the lightest unintentional touch of a few keys on the organ, a major chord has burst forth to shake the cathedral. So facile is this process, so free and uncontrived, that one almost gains the impression that the solution comes from without. Among the accompanying feelings are an excited sense of revelation and a melting away of all internal tensions, an intense admixture of certainty and serenity.

This moment of inspiration is saturated from base to peak with a clarity of feeling lasting seconds, minutes, or more. What comes next... is a residue of enhanced perceptual awareness mingled with a pervasive sense of awe, a sense of "the power" that hovers for hours or days thereafter. Potential scientists should be warned that these reactions are idiosyncratic and that although a sudden insight is always pleasing, there are few in whom it occasions such ecstasy. Moreover, there are presumably businessmen who derive much the same feelings from completing an exceptionally favourable deal.

Although, being of an optimistic nature, Professor Austin concentrates mainly on the rewards of the scientist, he does admit a few of the long-term. Experimental work can

become routine drudgery, and even worse if many lead uninteresting lives. One of the most important skills of the successful scientist is knowing when to abandon a given approach and when to persevere. Determination is not always rewarded, and the most brilliant-seeming idea may turn out to be worthless. Few scientists enjoy the labour of writing up their results, and the more prestigious scientific journals reject nine papers for every one they accept. Even when returned with scathing comments from anonymous referees who usually appear in the author to have wilfully misunderstood him. Nor does publication—even of important new discoveries—necessarily bring the acclaim that vanity expects. There is a sad paradox in the scientific community that new ideas undergo three phases: they are successively dismissed by other scientists—first as unintelligible, then as wrong, and finally as a mere repetition of something that is already well known.

In the final section of his book, Professor Austin speculates on the nature of the creative process: most writers on this topic attempt to conceal the banality of what they have to say under the cover of empirical data and he is no exception. He concludes that the creative scientist must possess curiosity, imagination, enthusiasm, discrimination and persistence. The findings of psychological research on creativity—some of which he quotes—have been similarly fogged in their conclusions. The creative scientist should be able to concentrate, be good at observation and at synthesis, be imaginative, judgmental, have independent

We do not understand the mechanisms of creativity and even the best research on it has largely served only to confirm our notions. A major impediment to problem-solving is the tendency to adopt a stereotyped approach which is often difficult to abandon; a break from cliché and dogma may allow the correct approach to surface. But we simply do not understand the nature of the unconscious mechanisms that produce such insights often when least expected. We know that decisions, a belief in a problem into its components, and working back from the desired goal may be helpful, and indeed there are in existence computer programs that succeed on well-defined problems by making this approach. The unknown can often be understood by analogy with the known, but how does the human mind isolate just that pattern of elements from the phenomenon under investigation which leads to a successful match with a model which is already understood?

Professor Austin's own prescription for forwarding our knowledge of the creative process is somewhat routine. He suggests that we should read the work of other scientists, celebrated, published, and how to recover a banana lying out of reach by using a stick. A battery of electrodes would be used to record the activity of the brain cells at the moment of insight and insert tubes would monitor changes in the brain's biochemical activity. Such an approach would be about as helpful in understanding the creative process as trying to understand the way a computer program works by monitoring the states of its transistors while the program was being run.

It is seldom appreciated that in taking in a visual scene or in understanding a simple sentence, the mind is performing acts of extraordinary creativity. Everyday perception involves accessing and bringing to bear vast stores of knowledge: it necessitates the making of complex inferences, the search through many possibilities and the formulation and testing of elaborate hypotheses in order to interpret and make sense of the fragmentary pattern of light reaching the eye. These processes are carried out effortlessly and unconsciously to a fraction of a second, yet they may be as complex as the creative thinking of an Einstein. The processes underlying perception have proved more amenable to study than scientific creativity and it may be that our best hope of understanding the latter is to advance our knowledge of the former.

1478 Oxford University Press 1978

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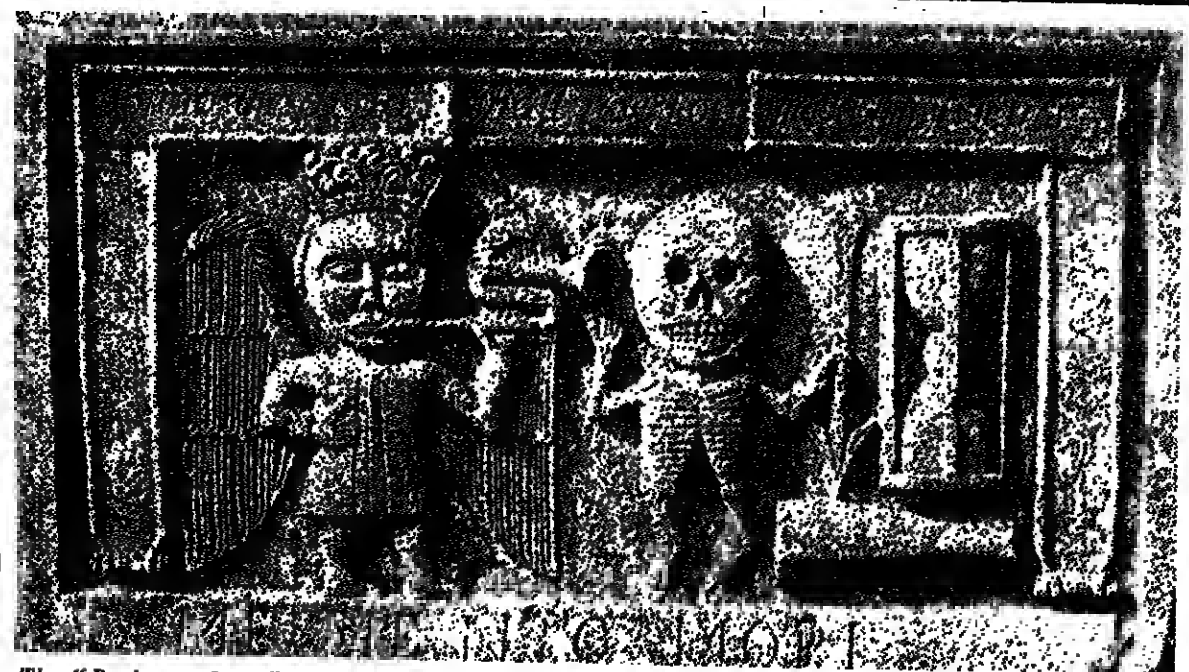
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28 September

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